

Caring Solutions

A newsletter for those providing unpaid care to family, spouses & friends
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John's, NL; A1A 3W8 CAREGIVER LINE: 1-888-571-2273
care@seniorsresource.ca

Winter 2011

This issue of the caring solutions newsletter has been dedicated entirely to stress management during the holiday season. For many families, the holiday season brings merriment, cheer and a certain excitement. Although this certainly can be true for caregivers as well, it may also have a negative impact because of all of the added tasks during this time. We also tend to forget that people also may find this time difficult due to the loss of a family member or friend.

The expense of buying gifts, the pressure of last minute shopping and the heightened expectations of family togetherness can all combine to undermine our best intentions. This on top of your regular caregiving responsibilities can be a heavy burden. Please take a brief moment to read through some of the suggestions and tips and hopefully this will make your holiday season a little easier. If all else fails, take a deep breath, and remember to take a moment each day just for you.

Sincerely,
Shelly Collins
Provincial Caregiver Coordinator
NL Caregivers Out of Isolation

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Caregiving and the Holidays: From Stress to Success!

For many family caregivers the holiday season can, at times, give rise to stress, frustration and anger instead of peace and good will. Caregivers may feel resentful towards other family members who they feel have not offered enough assistance. Managing care for someone who has a cognitive impairment may leave caregivers feeling that they will not be able to participate as fully as they would like in family gatherings. If they already feel overwhelmed with caregiving tasks, stressed-out caregivers may view traditional holiday preparations as more of a drain of precious energy than a joy.

Here are some suggestions that may help make the holidays more enjoyable for you and your loved ones. Keep in mind that the holidays can, in fact, provide unique opportunities to seek better communication, connection and support from family and friends.

An opportunity for communication

It's hard to know how much to communicate about a loved one's decline in cognitive functioning and personal care needs. Whom do you tell? How much do you tell? Although it is understandable to have reservations about discussing a loved one's impairments, honest communication about the realities of the caregiving situation offers others the opportunity to respond with assistance. Sharing the truths of your situation may help reduce some of the feelings of isolation and lack of appreciation common in caregivers.

Holiday greetings and a brief note

Some caregivers have had success in writing a brief note describing the person's condition and enclosing it in a holiday greeting card. This can be a non-threatening way to inform distant or uninvolved relatives about the realities of the caregiving situation. If written in a tone that's not accusatory or guilt-inducing, family members may be more forthcoming with assistance or, at least, have a better understanding of the effort you are putting into providing care.

Let sleeping dogs lie?

It is common for caregivers to be disappointed with family members who they feel are not "pulling their weight" in caregiving responsibilities. If this holds true for you, and your goal is to enjoy the holidays, you must decide how much and when to communicate this disappointment. Consider clearing the air before the holidays or perhaps resolve within yourself to put those feelings on hold, with the intention to discuss the matter after the holiday season passes. In the meantime, enjoy the holiday!

Be clear about your energy level

Let family members know that your caregiving duties are keeping you very busy and that you only have so much energy for holiday preparation and hosting duties.

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Accept the need to adapt

Caregivers often have to adapt their traditional role or experience of the holidays. This may mean allowing another family member to host more time-intensive festivities. You may need to modify the amount of time away from home to match the comfort level of your impaired loved one. You may also have to choose which events to attend based on which would be the simplest, least exhausting and most enjoyable for the person for whom you provide care—and for you.

The visit room

Don't expect the person with cognitive impairment to be able to adapt to all situations; you may need to adapt the environment to their needs. See if you can arrange to have another room in the house designated as a quiet place for the impaired person. Many people with dementia find multiple conversations and background noise disturbing. To avoid this anxiety, the person may benefit from time in a quieter room with fewer stimuli where family members could take turns visiting with them.



Share your wish list

- **Respite:** some caregivers ask for time off from caregiving duties as a gift for the holidays. This could mean another family member gives you a break. Sometimes asking for a Saturday off "in the next three months" is more accepted, as family members can then schedule it into their calendars. If this is not possible, perhaps they would consider paying for a home care worker or a stay at a respite facility.
- **Home repairs:** Do light bulbs need changing, or grab bars need installation? That maddening pile of junk in the garage needs to go to the dump? Tasks such as these may be the perfect way for a family member to help out if providing personal care is too uncomfortable for them.
- **Care for you!** How about a gift certificate for a massage, facial or manicure? How about an opportunity to spend the day fishing or a walk in the outdoors?
- **Book your homecare worker early!** Speak with your home care worker or home care agency early about your holiday plans!

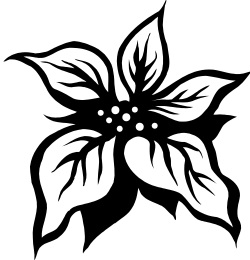
Schedule one-on-one time

While caregiving, it is easy to get caught up in all the tasks of personal care and homemaking chores. Make a point of setting some time aside this holiday season to enjoy the person you care for in a relaxed, one-on-one context. The best activities are those which take advantage of long-term memory—usually less impaired in people with dementia. Try looking through family photo albums or unpacking holiday decorations, which may stimulate memories.

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Reflect on the rewards

Reflecting on the rewards of caregiving can help maintain your self-esteem. It may feel very rewarding to know that you are fulfilling a vow or promise you have made to the person for whom you provide care. Your caregiving may be an expression of living up to your personal ideals or religious beliefs. You may also be experiencing a great deal of growth as you learn new skills and meet challenges in ways you never imagined possible.



A little thank you goes a long way

After the holidays, write a thank you note to family members or friends who spent time with your loved one. Emphasize the positive impact their visit or brief time spent with your loved one had on them. This may reinforce positive feelings from their visit and diminish any discomfort they experienced. They may then be more encouraged to visit again or be more supportive of your efforts.

Reprinted with permission of Family Caregiver Alliance, for more information, visit www.caregiver.org or call (800) 445-8106.

An Excellent Resource for you

Dementia Support for Families

The Geriatric Psychiatry Day Hospital staff at the Miller Center will be offering an **Early Diagnosis of Dementia Support Group**. It will consist of one and a half hour weekly sessions for an eight-week period. For further information and start date, please contact 709-777- 6149.

The Geriatric Psychiatry Day Hospital Staff at the Miller Center offers a **Caregiver Education Support Group** twice a year. It consists of one and half hour sessions for a seven-week period. For further information and start date, please contact 709-777- 6149.

Please email: care@seniorsresource.ca for what other resources may be available in your area.

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Loss and the Holiday Season

For many people, the holiday season is a special time of year marked by celebrations and gatherings with family and friends. For those struggling with the death of a loved one, the holidays may be a difficult time full of painful reminders that emphasize their sense of loss. A sense of loss can also occur before a person has actually died. As in the case of a person with Alzheimer's Disease, when they are not the person they once were.

Often, friends and family members of those affected by a loss are unsure how to act or what to say to support their grieving loved one during the holidays. Below are some tips that may help in supporting a loved one or friend with their grieving process during the holiday season.

1. Be supportive of the way the person chooses to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow traditions; others may choose to avoid customs of the past and do something new. It's okay to do things differently.
2. Offer to help the person with decorating or holiday baking. Both tasks can be overwhelming for someone who is grieving.
3. Offer to help with holiday shopping. Share catalogs or online shopping sites that may be helpful.
4. Invite the person to join you or your family during the holidays. You might invite them to join you for a religious service or at a holiday meal where they are a guest.
5. Ask the person if he or she is interested in volunteering with you during the holidays.
6. Doing something for someone else, such as helping at a soup kitchen or working with children, may help your loved one feel better about the holidays.
7. Donate a gift or money in memory of the person's loved one. Remind the person that his or her loved one is not forgotten.
8. Never tell someone that he or she should be "over it." Instead, give the person hope that, eventually, he or she will enjoy the holidays again.
9. Be willing to listen. Active listening from friends and family is an important step to helping some cope with grief and heal.
10. Remind the person you are thinking of him or her and the loved one who died. Cards, phone calls and visits are great ways to stay in touch.

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In general, the best way to help those who are grieving during the holidays is to let them know you care and that their loved one is not forgotten.

For more information on Bereavement Support call the **Caregiver Line** 1-888-572-2273

(Adapted from the Website Magazine of Alternative Medicine)

Financial Planning



Royal Bank of Canada RBC- has recently come up with a **Caregiver Planner** to assist you with some of the difficult financial questions you may have when **becoming an informal caregiver**. Royal Bank helps Canadians assess the costs of caring period with 'RBC Your Caregiving Planner'. It is a new online tool to help caregivers better prepare for the impacts that changes in their loved ones' health condition will have on the level of care required.

Visit their Website for additional information <https://services.rbc.com/caregiver/en/>



Answers to Fall 2011 Crossword

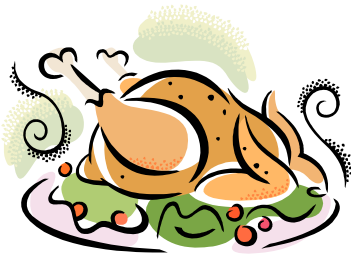
Down

1. Laughter
2. Support Group
3. Roots
4. Caregivers
5. Respite

Across

2. Stress
6. Networks
7. Caregiver
8. Friends

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Tips for reducing the stress of the Christmas lunch (or dinner)

Preparing a meal for family and friends can be enjoyable, but tiring and stressful at the same time. Some tips to reduce the stress of Christmas cooking include:

- If you are cooking lunch at home, delegate tasks. You don't need to do everything yourself.
- Consider keeping it simple – for instance, you could always arrange for a 'buffet' lunch, where everybody brings a platter.
- Make a list of food and ingredients needed. Buy as many non-perishable food items as you can in advance – supermarkets on Christmas Eve are generally extremely busy.
- Write a Christmas Day timetable. For example, 11.30am – put turkey in the oven.
- You may need to order particular food items (such as turkeys) from your supermarket by a certain date. Check to avoid disappointment.
- Consider doing your food shopping online. The store will deliver your groceries to your door. (Keep in mind this option is more expensive than visiting the supermarket yourself.)
- Book well in advance if you plan to have lunch at a restaurant. Some restaurants may be fully booked for months before Christmas, so don't wait till the last minute.

Taken with permission from the Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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Caregiver Line (*connected to this newsletter*) 1-888-571-2273

MS Society, Atlantic Division
1-800-268-7582

Seniors Resource Centre of NL
1-800-563-5599

VON Corner Brook
634-2042

24-HR Mental Health Crisis Line (*for anyone who needs to talk*)
1-888-737-4668

VON St. John's
726-8597

Alzheimer Society
1-877-776-0608

VON Gander
256-2924

Cancer Society Info Line
1-888-939-3333

Please let us know if you have contacts that you think might be helpful to other NL caregivers!

Parkinsons Society
1-800-567-7020

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If you're not already on our mailing list, just send us this form, write us an email at care@seniorsresource.ca or call us on the Caregiver Line 1-888-571-2273.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #: _____

Tick here if you'd like us to send you invitations to free caregiver events in your area.